

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 1:4–10 (17–19)

Sermon: “The Word”

God accomplishes great things. No surprise in that. What may be surprising is how he accomplishes great things—and what things are truly great. Great things God accomplishes through his word: the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, by his word casts out a demon, raises Simon’s mother-in-law from a fever, and heals many *“who were sick with various diseases”* (Gospel, Luke 4:40). Jesus’ teaching and healing show that *“his word possessed authority”* (4:32, 36) over death and the devil. God’s word calls a mere youth, Jeremiah, and enables him to destroy, overthrow, build, and plant nations and kingdoms (Old Testament Reading, Jeremiah 1:4, 9–10).

Wouldn’t you like to know about Jeremiah’s life before he became a prophet? What did he do in his childhood? What games did he play? How was he brought up and taught? Scripture doesn’t tell us much. We know his father, Hilkiah, was *“one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin”* (1:1).

We know he was born a couple of decades before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. And well, that's about it. Instead of a biography about his early years, Jeremiah describes his youth in a single sentence: ***“Now the word of the Lord came to me”*** (v 4). That's it. That's what we need to know about this prophet. The Word of the Lord came to him. It was the single most important event in his life, more important than his family history or his education or what kind of friends he hung out with. In the same way, the Word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah comes to you.

For better or—as it sometimes feels—for worse, the Word of the Lord forms and shapes us for our callings in this world and for the life of the world to come.

The Word of the Lord has that effect on people. It's not dead or lifeless but living, active, and mighty. It creates, shapes, and transforms. In the beginning, ***“God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”*** (Genesis 1:3).

The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and have a son, and she did. God's word can do anything in an instant, even impossible things. But God's word can also be like a seed. It can work over time. It's planted, it germinates and sprouts, then it grows, blossoms, and bears fruit. To sit and watch the grass grow is also to see his word at work, for "***God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation'***" (Genesis 1:11), and it did, and it still does. Even when the growth is so slow that it can hardly be seen, even if we begin to wonder whether there's really any growth happening, God's word is powerful and effective in nature and in us.

Just ask Jeremiah. The word of the Lord happened to him. Not that he was looking for it. He didn't sit down one day, glance through a career catalog, and pick out "prophet" thinking, "Hmm, those seem to be in short supply and the benefits sound really good." As far as he was concerned, God's word took him by surprise and led in directions he didn't expect. He wasn't entirely convinced that being a prophet was right for him, and he wasn't always happy with it.

There were times when his work felt far less rewarding and fruitful than what you do each day.

So, this living, active, powerful word came to Jeremiah: ***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations”*** (v 5). Isn’t that just like God? He knows people and fashions them and sets them apart for his purposes. They’re his vessels—earthen ones, jars of clay, creatures of dust, certainly—but also chosen and loved by him.

Jeremiah wasn’t picked because he was a great speaker or had a charismatic personality. Instead, he was a living example of what St. Paul says: ***“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”*** (1 Corinthians 1:28–29). It was entirely by grace. The Lord isn’t ashamed of human flesh. He isn’t scared off by sin or weakness.

So, God called Jeremiah and appointed him to be a prophet to the nations. ***“Then the Lord stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth’”*** (v 9). God fills Jeremiah’s mouth with his powerful, living, active word. This word, the Lord says, will be ***“over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant”*** (v 10). And Jeremiah said, “You’ve got the wrong guy. I’m just a youth, a child. I think you’re looking for the guy next door.” And the Lord said, “Oh, just wait and see what I’ll do with a youth, with my word in a human mouth, with the body and life I created. I mean you! I’m sending you to speak my word, to preach repentance to my people, to call them back from idolatry and sin.” The gracious and merciful Lord sends Jeremiah to call sinners to repentance, to bring them comfort, good, and delight in him.

But it didn’t make Jeremiah’s life easy. He was sent to proclaim judgment. Jerusalem would be destroyed. The temple would be torn down. The king would be taken away.

Yet, after all that, the Lord would restore those who were lost and condemned. He was sent to deliver a promise. God would again build up his people and make them new by forgiving their sins. He would plant the ***“righteous Branch”*** in their midst (23:5). Yet Jeremiah’s calling would often feel like a burden. He would suffer for it. He was beaten and placed in stocks (20:2), imprisoned (37:15), thrown into a cistern (38:6), and carried off to Egypt (43:6–7). He would moan and complain about his situation too, even lamenting the day he was born (20:14). Sounds familiar! Even so, the Lord equipped Jeremiah for his work and was working through him.

And Jeremiah wasn’t sent out alone. He was given a promise. The Lord said, ***“I am with you to deliver you”*** (vs 8, 19). He tells Jeremiah, ***“Even when people oppose you or speak against you, even though you suffer for the sake of my name and my word and for doing what is right, even though the work is hard and you can’t see the fruit of your labor, I am with you to deliver you.”***

That word was life for Jeremiah. The Lord would deliver him, and he would do it with the word—with the Word made flesh. In the fullness of time, Jesus came. His word possessed authority to drive out demons and fight back death. He, too, would be rejected, condemned, and crucified. On the cross, God's Word appeared to be powerless, lifeless, ineffective. But on the third day, Jesus was delivered and raised up as the living Word. He is the deliverance—even from death—of those who trust in him, and in him the Word bears fruit for eternity.

Now the Word of the Lord has come to you and to me. The Lord who knew and loved Jeremiah from the womb has also known and loved you from the womb. Though you aren't called to be a prophet, you are called to be a baptized child of God, to live in faith toward him and in fervent love toward others. He has chosen and consecrated you to be his person wherever you are—in your home, your office, your school or neighborhood, for the sake of your son, your sister, your nephew, your neighbor.

And this not because of any merit or worthiness in you but because of his own grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. For Jesus' sake, "***You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession***" (1 Peter 2:9).

But we want to protest. You can't possibly mean me! You don't know my past, my background, my sad and sorry history. What good can I do? But listen! It's not about you. It's about his Word. By his Word, he intends to make something of you—even you! To fashion you into his vessel, holy and pure, to use you for his good purposes here. You may wonder how this can be, but the Lord simply says, "Let it be," and it is. The Word of the Lord comes and takes up your life, your past, your childhood, your youth, your weaknesses, sins, and sicknesses. He takes them into himself, nails them to his cross, buries them in his grave, and then rises and says, "Now watch what I can do!" He makes all things new, and he is the Word in the water that has already made a new you.

That's not all! He also gives us the same promise that he gave to Jeremiah: ***"I am with you to deliver you"*** (vs 8, 19). We don't labor alone, live alone, work alone. What Jesus said to the entire Church was spoken for each of us: ***"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"*** (Matthew 28:20). And he keeps that promise in every Absolution: "I am with you. Your sins are forgiven." In every Holy Communion: "I am with you. Life and salvation are in my body and blood." The Word touches our ears. It touches our mouths. It penetrates our bodies. He takes us, cleanses us, and makes us holy for service in this world. He strengthens our faith in God and our love for our neighbor.

So, our life, like Jeremiah's, has been marked by the Word of the Lord. And our life, like Jeremiah's, are marked by the promise of his presence. His Word is at work in and through each of us, and it's not finished with us yet. This is only the beginning. The seed that has been planted here will blossom and bear its fruit in due season.

Oh, what the Word of the Lord can do! It makes something out of nothing. It makes a prophet out of Jeremiah and a saint out of a sinner. He takes what is small and despised and makes it of infinite value with his blood. His Word plants for eternity, builds a heavenly city, and even raises the dead. And his Word will deliver us and keep us safe. So, we pray that “when our last hour comes” he would “give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (SC, Seventh Petition). And when the Last Day comes, we believe that he will raise us, and Jeremiah too, to life eternal.

The Word that began this good work in Jeremiah and has begun it also in you will “bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”

(Philippians 1:6).

Amen